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### **EPA Afternoon News Highlights 11.9.17**

#### **The Washington Free Beacon: Obama's EPA Spent \$690,000 on Parking Spots No One Used**

The Environmental Protection Agency spent nearly \$700,000 for parking spots that no one used during the final two years of the Obama administration. The office of inspector general released an audit Wednesday finding the agency wasted taxpayer dollars on subsidized parking for employees at its Washington, D.C., headquarters. "Only EPA headquarters (based in Washington, D.C.) and Region 4 (based in Atlanta, Georgia) subsidized employee parking," the inspector general said. "These offices paid over \$840,000 to subsidize employee parking from January 1, 2015, through December 31, 2016." "In this time period, none of the other EPA regional offices provided their employees with subsidized parking, which is not a required employee benefit," the inspector general added.

#### **The Washington Times: Senate narrowly confirms Bill Wehrum to lead key EPA air office**

The Senate on Thursday narrowly confirmed President Trump's pick to head the EPA's office of air and radiation, widely considered the second most important post at the agency. On a party-line vote of 49 to 47, the chamber approved Bill Wehrum to lead the office. The nomination of Mr. Wehrum, a former energy industry attorney who worked in the EPA during the George W. Bush administration, was deeply opposed by Democrats and environmental groups who said his ties to the energy sector represent massive conflicts of interest. In his new position, Mr. Wehrum will directly oversee agency efforts to undo many Obama-era regulations, including the Clean Power Plan, a set of emissions limits on coal-fired power plants that the Trump EPA plans to scrap.

#### **The Hill: EPA seeks to repeal part of Obama emissions rule for big trucks**

The Trump administration is proposing to repeal a key piece of former President Obama's regulation limiting greenhouse gas emissions from big trucks. The proposal unveiled Thursday

by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would remove so-called glider kits from a major regulation written last year that restricted emissions from heavy-duty trucks. Glider kits are incomplete truck bodies that owners — frequently small businesses or individual truck drivers — can buy and install with older engines, transmissions and axles to form complete trucks. The Trump administration argues that the Clean Air Act, which gave Obama the authority to write the emissions rule, does not allow glider kits to be regulated because they are not motor vehicles or engines.

**The Washington Examiner: No. The toxicologist Trump nominated to head the EPA chemical office does not kick puppies and poison kids**

Democrats are devoted to a single line of attack against President Trump’s nominee to head the EPA chemical and pesticides office. They accuse Michael Dourson, a toxicologist with decades of experience, of kicking puppies and poisoning kids. Ranking member of the Committee on Environment, Sen. Tom Carper of Delaware concluded that Dourson didn’t have “a good heart.” Sen. Tom Udall of New Mexico declared the nominee “might be the worst yet.” And Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut claimed the conservative would do a poor job regulating chemicals that “can literally kill people, or stunt the growth of children, or make people sick.” But if those Democrats took a closer look at Dourson, if they actually examined his record, they’d see evidence of the opposite. He doesn’t kick puppies and he doesn’t poison kids. He saves them. Literally.

**The Press-Democrat: EPA warns Northern California residents affected by wildfires to beware of scams**

The Environmental Protection Agency is alerting local residents affected by the recent wildfires of possible fraudsters posing as EPA agents and seeking personal financial information by phone. EPA officials said Wednesday that in their current work responding to the North Coast wildfires, they are not requesting such information. “We are not asking for any personal financial information like Social Security numbers and bank account numbers,” said EPA spokeswoman Margot Perez-Sullivan. The EPA received a call Wednesday morning from a Santa Rosa resident who said they were contacted by someone claiming to be with the EPA, Perez-Sullivan said.

**The Washington Examiner: Trump oversees major natural gas deal between Alaska, China**

The state of Alaska has struck a major joint development deal with China on Wednesday to build a natural gas export terminal in the state. The agreement was signed in the presence of President Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping during his state visit to China on Thursday, according to the Alaska Gasline Development Corporation, one of the party's to the deal along with the State of Alaska. “This is an agreement that will provide Alaska with an economic boom

comparable to the development of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System in the 1970s,” said Alaska Gov. Bill Walker. The development corporation and the state government signed the joint liquefied natural gas, or LNG, development agreement with the state-ran China Petrochemical Corporation, or Sinopec, CIC Capital Corporation, and Bank of China.

### **National Afternoon News Highlights 11.9.17**

#### **Politico: Defying Trump, Senate GOP plan will delay corporate tax cut until 2019**

The Senate tax reform bill expected Thursday will delay the implementation of a lower corporate tax rate until 2019, a sharp break with the White House. The Senate plan would also set a top individual tax rate of 38.5 percent and keep deductions for people with high medical bills and for student loan interest, according to a summary. The change in the corporate tax cut from the House bill, H.R. 1 (115), which would institute a 20 percent corporate rate in 2018, is likely to anger President Donald Trump and the White House, which wants the change to happen as soon as possible. The effort to reduce the corporate rate is the centerpiece of the GOP plan to lower tax rates and spur faster economic growth. But the Senate is trying to limit the revenue impact to allow a bill to pass with just 51 votes and avoid a possible Democratic filibuster.

#### **Axios: Trump’s mystery plan for Mideast peace**

Israeli and Palestinian officials expect President Trump to unveil a Mideast peace proposal by early next year. What nobody knows yet is the shape it will take or if the proposal will be based on creating a Palestinian state, which has been U.S. policy for the last 20 years. In the meantime, the two sides are on their best behavior to avoid being singled out by Trump as an obstructionist party. Sound smart: The U.S. "peace team" working on the issue is relatively small and very discreet — just five people, including senior adviser Jared Kushner and special envoy Jason Greenblatt. The entire process is being run out of the White House, with the State Department and other agencies providing advice and support. According to U.S. officials, Trump is the driving force on this issue and is personally involved. Israeli officials say they hear Trump is pushing his team to have a proposal soon. In the last nine months Trump has met Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian President Abbas separately three times each to discuss his peace initiative. His special envoy Jason Greenblatt has been constantly shuttling between Jerusalem, Ramallah and Arab capitals.

#### **The Wall Street Journal: Democrats, GOP Spar Over Who Is to Blame for Rising Health-Insurance Premiums**

The day before Halloween, Dorie Lawson learned her health insurance premiums would jump by 60% next year to nearly \$3,000 a month. Now she is looking for someone to blame. Her insurer, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Wyoming, cited uncertainty about health policy in Washington, especially regarding federal payments to insurers, in raising its premiums this way. Ms. Lawson, of Sheridan, Wyo., wonders if President Donald Trump, who in October decided to end those subsidies, is at least partly to blame. "Trump had that executive order on health care, and I think it's made it worse for us," said Ms. Lawson, adding she is unsure how to pay for the premium increase. "We were up all night feeling like we got punched. We're figuring out what we're going to do."

## TRUMP TWEETS

# The Washington Free Beacon

<http://freebeacon.com/issues/obamas-epa-spent-690000-parking-spots-no-one-used/>

## **Obama's EPA Spent \$1.5 Million To Subsidize Parking For Senior Employees**

By Liz Harrington, 11/9/17

The Environmental Protection Agency spent nearly \$700,000 for parking spots that no one used during the final two years of the Obama administration.

The office of inspector general released an audit Wednesday finding the agency wasted taxpayer dollars on subsidized parking for employees at its Washington, D.C., headquarters.

"Only EPA headquarters (based in Washington, D.C.) and Region 4 (based in Atlanta, Georgia) subsidized employee parking," the inspector general said. "These offices paid over \$840,000 to subsidize employee parking from January 1, 2015, through December 31, 2016."

"In this time period, none of the other EPA regional offices provided their employees with subsidized parking, which is not a required employee benefit," the inspector general added.

Not only did the EPA use resources on unnecessary parking benefits that could have gone towards environmental projects, it also paid \$293.45 per month for parking spots that were not being used. More than a quarter of the parking spots the EPA paid for its D.C. headquarters were unoccupied.

"We also found that, from January 2015 through December 2016, 29 percent of the parking spaces that headquarters leased for its employees and 27 percent of the parking spaces that Region 4 leased for its employees remained unoccupied," the inspector general said. "The EPA paid approximately \$690,000 for these unoccupied parking spaces."

The inspector general said the \$1.5 million spent on subsidized parking and unused parking spots could have been used for mission-critical work.

"While the parking subsidy is permitted, it is not required," the inspector general said. "In an age of dwindling federal resources, the EPA's use of taxpayer money—over \$840,000 in a 2-year period—to fund employee parking may not be an effective use of federal resources and may take funds away from mission-critical public health and environmental initiatives."

Under administrator Scott Pruitt, the EPA made plans to return 53 unused parking spaces earlier this year, which would save taxpayers \$186,634.20 annually.

## The Washington Times

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/nov/9/bill-wehrum-narrowly-confirmed-senate-lead-key-epa/>

### **Senate narrowly confirms Bill Wehrum to lead key EPA air office**

By Ben Wolfgang, 11/9/17

The Senate on Thursday narrowly confirmed President Trump's pick to head the EPA's office of

air and radiation, widely considered the second most important post at the agency.

On a party-line vote of 49 to 47, the chamber approved Bill Wehrum to lead the office. The nomination of Mr. Wehrum, a former energy industry attorney who worked in the EPA during the George W. Bush administration, was deeply opposed by Democrats and environmental groups who said his ties to the energy sector represent massive conflicts of interest.

In his new position, Mr. Wehrum will directly oversee agency efforts to undo many Obama-era regulations, including the Clean Power Plan, a set of emissions limits on coal-fired power plants that the Trump EPA plans to scrap.

“The EPA’s air office has been responsible for creating the agency’s most punishing regulations,” Sen. John Barrasso, Wyoming Republican and chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works committee, said after the vote. “Bill Wehrum’s three decades of environmental policy experience will be enormously helpful as he works to cut red tape, protect America’s air, and allow our economy to grow.”

Green groups say Mr. Wehrum surely will favor energy-industry growth over clean air, making him a deeply unsettling choice.

“It’s genuinely hard to fathom someone less suited to lead clean air efforts at the EPA than Bill Wehrum,” said Andrea Delgado, legislative director for healthy communities at the environmental group Earthjustice. “Like other Trump nominees, he has made a career leading efforts to weaken standards that protect us from mercury, silica, lead, and smog at the expense of the health and safety of children, workers, and communities. While he works overtime to unwind crucial health safeguards that keep our air clean, we will be watching his every move and stand ready to hold him accountable if he oversteps his authorities.”

## The Hill

<http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/359620-epa-seeks-to-repeal-part-of-obama-emissions-rule-for-big-trucks>

## **EPA seeks to repeal part of Obama emissions rule for big trucks**

By Tim Cama, 11/9/17

The Trump administration is proposing to repeal a key piece of former President Obama's regulation limiting greenhouse gas emissions from big trucks.

The proposal unveiled Thursday by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would remove so-called glider kits from a major regulation written last year that restricted emissions from heavy-duty trucks.

Glider kits are incomplete truck bodies that owners — frequently small businesses or individual truck drivers — can buy and install with older engines, transmissions and axles to form complete trucks.

The Trump administration argues that the Clean Air Act, which gave Obama the authority to write the emissions rule, does not allow glider kits to be regulated because they are not motor vehicles or engines.

“The previous administration attempted to bend the rule of law and expand the reach of the federal government in a way that threatened to put an entire industry of specialized truck manufacturers out of business,” EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said in a statement.

“Accordingly, the agency is taking comment on an interpretation of the Clean Air Act that recognizes the unique nature of a vehicle made up of both new and used component parts. Gliders not only provide a more affordable option for smaller owners and operators, but also serve as a key economic driver to numerous rural communities,” he said.

The EPA received a handful of petitions to remove gliders from the 2016 rule from companies that sell and use gliders, arguing that they cannot be regulated. In August, Pruitt agreed to formally consider the requests.

The glider standards generally pertained to the aerodynamic efficiency of the vehicle kits, since gliders do not have engines that could be made more efficient.

Environmental and health groups are fighting the change, saying it would increase emissions.

“With the proposal to repeal the air pollution limits for glider vehicles, engines and kits used for refurbishing tractor trailers, EPA issues another devastating blow to air quality and public health, giving older dirty heavy-duty trucks a license to pollute the air we all breathe with nitrogen oxides and particulate matter that can cause asthma attacks, lung cancer and premature death — as well as carbon pollution that causes climate change,” National Lung Association President Harold Wimmer said last month when the EPA took a step toward the proposal.

The EPA estimated that 10,000 glider kits are sold each year, representing 5 percent of the new heavy duty truck market.

Wednesday’s action does not affect other parts of the rule. The Obama administration estimated that the regulation as a whole would cut 1.1 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions and make trucks 25 percent more efficient, according to data from the Obama administration.

Last month, amid challenges to the regulation, a federal appeals court halted the section of the 2016 heavy truck rule that applied to truck trailers’ aerodynamics. Opponents had argued that the EPA does not have the authority to regulate trailers.

## The Washington Examiner

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/no-the-toxicologist-trump-nominated-to-head-the-epa-chemical-office-does-not-kick-puppies-and-poison-kids/article/2640166>

**No. The toxicologist Trump nominated to head the EPA chemical office does not kick**

## **puppies and poison kids**

By Philip Wegmann, 11/9/17

Democrats are devoted to a single line of attack against President Trump's nominee to head the EPA chemical and pesticides office. They accuse Michael Dourson, a toxicologist with decades of experience, of kicking puppies and poisoning kids.

Ranking member of the Committee on Environment, Sen. Tom Carper of Delaware concluded that Dourson didn't have "a good heart." Sen. Tom Udall of New Mexico declared the nominee "might be the worst yet." And Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut claimed the conservative would do a poor job regulating chemicals that "can literally kill people, or stunt the growth of children, or make people sick."

But if those Democrats took a closer look at Dourson, if they actually examined his record, they'd see evidence of the opposite. He doesn't kick puppies and he doesn't poison kids. He saves them. Literally.

When a Kentucky family of four became dangerously ill in 2013 and suspected pollutants on their property, no one believed them. Not the original owner. Not the builder. And not the public health inspector. It was Dourson and his nonprofit organization, TERA, who discovered that harmful levels of airborne hydrogen sulfide was making the children sick and their pets foam from the mouth.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epwdtcl-Zmk>

Later in California, Dourson served as an expert witness to help 130 San Francisco families poisoned by chemicals seeping into their homes from a nearby rail line. "Dr. Dourson's work resulted in significant settlements with the railroad and related property owners due to the risk inherent in exposure to the TCE vapors," wrote trial attorney Richard Bowles.

Clearly two examples are not enough to merit confirmation of the toxicologist. But when

combined with the decades of experience, his 15 years of work with the EPA, and the four bronze medals he won from the agency, however, they seem to suggest that Dourson is a decently, honorable fellow and a more-than-qualified nominee.

## The Press Democrat

<http://www.pressdemocrat.com/news/7615880-181/epa-warns-northern-california-residents>

### **EPA warns Northern California residents affected by wildfires to beware of scams**

By Martin ERspinoza, 11/8/17

The Environmental Protection Agency is alerting local residents affected by the recent wildfires of possible fraudsters posing as EPA agents and seeking personal financial information by phone.

EPA officials said Wednesday that in their current work responding to the North Coast wildfires, they are not requesting such information.

“We are not asking for any personal financial information like Social Security numbers and bank account numbers,” said EPA spokeswoman Margot Perez-Sullivan.

The EPA received a call Wednesday morning from a Santa Rosa resident who said they were contacted by someone claiming to be with the EPA, Perez-Sullivan said.

The fraudster said the local resident was being awarded a grant but needed to provide some financial information.

The resident suspected fraud and contacted the EPA.

Perez-Sullivan said the EPA's singular task in Sonoma and Napa counties is to remove household hazardous waste from damaged or destroyed property. EPA staff have been contacting local residents affected by the fires, but only about waste removal.

"We have been contacting certain homeowners or property owners on a case by case basis ... to let us know when we can access a property," Perez-Sullivan said.

"We are only contacting people regarding household hazardous waste collection."

Anyone who receives a suspicious call should decline the request and promptly call the EPA Inspector General's hotline at 888-546-8740, as well as the California Attorney General's office at 800-952-5225.

A complaint can be filed at [oag.ca.gov/complaint](http://oag.ca.gov/complaint). You can reach Staff Writer Martin Espinoza at 707-521-5213 or [martin.espinoza@pressdemocrat.com](mailto:martin.espinoza@pressdemocrat.com).

## The Washington Examiner

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/trump-oversees-major-natural-gas-deal-between-alaska-china/article/2640134> **Trump oversees major natural gas deal between Alaska, China**

By John Siciliano, 11/9/17

The state of Alaska has struck a major joint development deal with China on Wednesday to build a natural gas export terminal in the state.

The agreement was signed in the presence of President Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping during his state visit to China on Thursday, according to the Alaska Gasline Development Corporation, one of the party's to the deal along with the State of Alaska.

“This is an agreement that will provide Alaska with an economic boom comparable to the development of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System in the 1970s,” said Alaska Gov. Bill Walker.

The development corporation and the state government signed the joint liquefied natural gas, or LNG, development agreement with the state-ran China Petrochemical Corporation, or Sinopec, CIC Capital Corporation, and Bank of China.

“Today’s agreement brings the potential customer, lender, equity investor, and developer together with a common objective of crafting mutually beneficial agreements leading to increased LNG trade between Alaska and China,” said Keith Meyer, president the Alaska development corporation.

Sinopec said its goal is to help create a "stable" route for purchasing LNG from Alaska.

The liquefied natural gas project named Alaska LNG will include three trains, or terminals, with the annual capacity of producing 20 million tons of liquefied product for shipment abroad to Asia.

The facility will also include an 800-mile-long pipeline, a gas treatment plant on the North Slope of Alaska where much of its energy production takes place.

"Under the agreement, the parties have agreed to work cooperatively on LNG marketing, financing, investment model and China content in Alaska LNG, and get a periodic result by 2018," according to a joint statement.

“As the most internationalized bank in China, Bank of China is willing to facilitate the China-U.S. energy cooperation and provide financial solutions for this transaction by taking advantage of its vast experiences and expertise in international mega-project financing,” a statement by the Bank of China said.

# Politico

<https://www.politico.com/story/2017/11/09/senate-tax-bill-2017-244743>

## **Defying Trump, Senate GOP plan will delay corporate tax cut until 2019**

By Ben White, Josh Dawsey, Aaron Lorenzo, and Brian Faler, 11/9/17

The Senate tax reform bill expected Thursday will delay the implementation of a lower corporate tax rate until 2019, a sharp break with the White House.

The Senate plan would also set a top individual tax rate of 38.5 percent and keep deductions for people with high medical bills and for student loan interest, according to a summary.

The change in the corporate tax cut from the House bill, H.R. 1 (115), which would institute a 20 percent corporate rate in 2018, is likely to anger President Donald Trump and the White House, which wants the change to happen as soon as possible.

The effort to reduce the corporate rate is the centerpiece of the GOP plan to lower tax rates and spur faster economic growth. But the Senate is trying to limit the revenue impact to allow a bill to pass with just 51 votes and avoid a possible Democratic filibuster.

In another break with Trump, neither the Senate bill or a revised House bill will include a repeal of the Obamacare individual mandate to have health coverage. But Senate Republicans are still considering a repeal to help pay the cost of making some tax cuts permanent.

GOP leaders are talking with rank-and-file members to assess whether they have the necessary 50 votes to scrap the least popular part of Obamacare.

Trump has pushed for the repealing the mandate, along with conservative senators. But many

lawmakers said reopening the health care debate would just make passing the tax bill harder.

As the first details were trickling out about the Senate plan, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady unveiled a new round of changes to his party's plan to rewrite the tax code.

The 29-page amendment offers a new, super-low 9 percent tax rate to small businesses, an apparent effort to appeal to the influential NFIB which has been unhappy with Brady's plans to tax so-called pass-throughs. The tax would apply to businesses' first \$75,000 of income.

The new plan also keeps a tax break for adopting children, a provision that had been on the chopping block to the consternation of many Republicans. The Senate also kept that break.

Other House provisions would expand a tax on private university endowments, alter a plan addressing international tax avoidance, impose a surtax on life insurance companies and increase a one-time tax on companies' overseas earnings, among other changes. Under the revised plan, businesses would pay a 14 percent tax on liquid assets, and 7 percent on illiquid ones, up from 12 percent and 5 percent, respectively.

It would also impose a new requirement on those claiming a tax break for having children, stipulating taxpayers must provide a Social Security number for the child in order to claim the entire credit.

The revisions are aimed at bringing the plan H.R. 1 (115) back into compliance with the party's budget, which allows them to cut taxes by no more than \$1.5 trillion, as well as address complaints from Brady's fellow Republicans. They are \$146 billion over budget, according to Ed Lorenzen, a budget expert at the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

The changes come as the committee aims to wrap up its work on the plan today.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, asked about the possibility of a corporate tax cut delay by Fox Business Network, said, "The president would like this to go into effect right away."

But he added that the Senate and House "are having to look at how we pay for all of this ..."

"These are things that are still being discussed," he said. "Obviously, right away is better than a year. But a year is better than obviously a longer phase in."

Senate Republicans were briefed on the entire tax plan Thursday.

Some GOP members have been adamant that there be no delay.

"There's no need for that, that is nothing but a gimmick here in Washington, there's no need for that. We need to get this change in and get it in as soon as possible," David Perdue of Georgia said on Wednesday.

Coming out of the briefing, John McCain of Arizona, one of the GOP members whose vote is being closely watched, said he was "favorably inclined" toward the bill based on Hatch taking it through regular order in committee, which was a concern he often raised on the Obamacare repeal that he ultimately opposed.

## Axios

<https://www.axios.com/trumps-mystery-plan-for-mideast-peace-2507223543.html>

### **Trump's mystery plan for Mideast peace**

By Barak Ravid, 11/9/17

Israeli and Palestinian officials expect President Trump to unveil a Mideast peace proposal by early next year. What nobody knows yet is the shape it will take or if the proposal will be based on creating a Palestinian state, which has been U.S. policy for the last 20 years. In the meantime, the two sides are on their best behavior to avoid being singled out by Trump as an obstructionist party.

**Sound smart:** The U.S. "peace team" working on the issue is relatively small and very discreet — just five people, including senior adviser Jared Kushner and special envoy Jason Greenblatt. The entire process is being run out of the White House, with the State Department and other agencies providing advice and support. According to U.S. officials, Trump is the driving force on this issue and is personally involved. Israeli officials say they hear Trump is pushing his team to have a proposal soon.

**In the last nine months Trump** has met Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian President Abbas separately three times each to discuss his peace initiative. His special envoy Jason Greenblatt has been constantly shuttling between Jerusalem, Ramallah and Arab capitals.

- Greenblatt's last trip to the region lasted three weeks, and Kushner, who is officially leading the "peace team," came to the region three times and spends hours every week in phone calls with Arab leaders in order to get their support.

- The small, close-knit team has meant almost no leaks and zero public scandals, mistakes or embarrassments. (The other members are Deputy National Security Adviser Dina Powell, U.S. Ambassador to Tel-Aviv David Friedman and Consul General to Jerusalem Don Blome.)

#### **What they're saying:**

- **Netanyahu told U.K. Prime Minister May** last week that he's in "wait and see mode" and expecting a proposal late this year or early next year, according to Israeli and British officials. "I don't know what peace plan Trump is about to present and I am not sure anybody knows, but I am happy the Trump team is bringing fresh and out of the box thinking on this issue," he said.

- **Abbas told a group of former Israeli members of Knesset** that he expects a plan later this year and that Trump has told him he supports the two-state solution and is planning to make his position public soon, according to people present at the meeting.

- **A White House official says** there is no artificial deadline and the goal is to "facilitate a deal that works for both Israelis and Palestinians, not to impose anything on them".

#### **What to watch:**

- **Trump is counting on Saudi Arabia** to help get both the Israelis and Palestinians to say yes to any initiative. Kushner builds on his close relationship with the Saudi crown prince

Mohamed Bin Salman as a conduit for a much bigger Saudi role in the peace process than ever before. Kushner's meeting with MBS in Riyadh two weeks ago focused mainly on this issue. President Abbas was in Riyadh earlier this week to talk about the peace process with the Saudi leadership.

- ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ **Vice President Mike Pence will visit** in mid-December and meet with both Netanyahu and Abbas and likely urge the parties to go back to the negotiating table.

- ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ **Netanyahu's political situation** could be destabilized by a peace plan that includes Israeli concessions on politically charged issues, like borders, settlements and the future of Jerusalem. The ongoing police investigation against Netanyahu on alleged corruption makes his political situation even more sensitive.

- ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ **Abbas is in the midst of implementing a reconciliation deal** with his rival party Hamas. The deal, which was led by Egypt with quiet support from the White House, includes the gradual transfer of control over the Gaza strip back to the Palestinian authority. A collapse of this agreement could have serious implications on any push for a peace deal.

## The Wall Street Journal

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/democrats-gop-spar-over-who-is-to-blame-for-rising-health-insurance-premiums-1510232400>

### Democrats, GOP Spar Over Who Is to Blame for Rising Health-Insurance Premiums

By Stephanie Armour, 11/9/17

The day before Halloween, Dorie Lawson learned her health insurance premiums would jump by 60% next year to nearly \$3,000 a month.

Now she is looking for someone to blame. Her insurer, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Wyoming, cited uncertainty about health policy in Washington, especially regarding federal payments to insurers, in raising its premiums this way.

Ms. Lawson, of Sheridan, Wyo., wonders if President Donald Trump, who in October decided to end those subsidies, is at least partly to blame.

“Trump had that executive order on health care, and I think it’s made it worse for us,” said Ms. Lawson, adding she is unsure how to pay for the premium increase. “We were up all night feeling like we got punched. We’re figuring out what we’re going to do.”

The battle in Washington over the fate of the Obama-era law is now starting to hit Americans’ pocketbooks as the ACA’s open enrollment seasons begins, allowing consumers to choose their plans for 2018. Millions of people who don’t get subsidies are seeing steeper costs, sparking a battle between Democrats and Republicans over who gets the blame.

Tuesday’s election results suggest the politics of health care may be tilting against Republicans for the first time in years. Democrats have long paid a political price for the ACA’s unpopularity, losing elections since 2010 after the law was passed through last year, when the health law’s problems factored heavily into the Republican message.

But this week, Virginia voters cited health care in exit polls as an important reason for delivering the governorship to Democrat Ralph Northam, while a ballot initiative in Maine to expand the state’s Medicaid program won decisively. That follows the GOP’s failure to repeal the ACA and low public approval for the alternatives it offered.

If those developments signal a broader shift in the landscape, it could have a big impact on the 2018 midterm elections, where all seats in the House and a third in the Senate are up for grabs. Adding an unpredictable element to the mix, many voters in states that supported Mr. Trump will face some of the biggest increases.

In Deaf Smith, Texas, for example, a 40-year old single individual who earns too much for federal aid will see premiums jump 87%—from about \$290 to \$540—according to a Kaiser Family Foundation analysis of prices for a popular, midprice health plan. Only people who make less than 400% of the poverty level—about \$48,000 in most states this year—are eligible for federal aid.

In Clinton, Iowa, premiums will rise from \$288 to \$781, an increase of 171%, for the same plan.

According to an October poll by The Wall Street Journal and NBC News, 50% of Americans would blame Republicans if health-care costs rise and people lose coverage, while 37% would blame Democrats.

Both sides have begun positioning themselves for the coming campaign. About 40 liberal-leaning groups announced recently they would join forces to target Republicans on health care in 2018.

In the Virginia governor's race, Mr. Northam ran ads spotlighting his career as a pediatrician and pledging to "provide access to health care for all Virginians, not take it away." He criticized Mr. Trump for ending payments to insurers that subsidize low-income consumers.

Mr. Trump, for his part, has begun pointing the finger at Democrats. "As usual, the ObamaCare premiums will be up (the Dems own it), but we will Repeal & Replace and have great Healthcare soon after Tax Cuts!" he tweeted recently. A new Republican ad blames rising premiums on the ACA, blaming Democrats for blocking GOP plans to overhaul it.

The conflict is also playing out within parties. Nevada GOP Senate candidate Danny Tarkanian tweeted in September that incumbent Sen. Dean Heller (R., Nev.) was "deceitful" for backing a bill that would have cut Medicaid after saying he wouldn't. Democrats have also run ads hammering Mr. Heller for supporting ACA repeal.

Mr. Heller has responded by seeking to position himself in the middle, saying that "Obamacare clearly isn't the answer—but doing nothing isn't the answer either."

Mr. Trump in early October stopped paying billions of dollars to insurers under an ACA program that offset subsidies received by some lower-income consumers to help with out-of-pocket medical costs. Some states had let insurers file higher rates for 2018 in case the payments ceased, while others moved quickly following Mr. Trump's action to let insurers raise rates.

Sen. Patty Murray (D., Wash.) and Sen. Lamar Alexander (R., Tenn.) offered a bill restoring the payments to insurers for two years, while giving states more say in implementing the ACA. Mr. Trump opposes the deal, but if it passes in December, as backers hope, consumers would start getting notices about rate relief from insurers about a month before the 2018 election.

“The people who are forgotten are the nine million who don’t get insurance on the job or federal government and don’t get subsidies,” said Mr. Alexander. “They’re getting hammered.”

Some Republicans support the Alexander-Murray proposal. Others are ramping up efforts to repeal the ACA’s requirement that most people have health coverage or pay a fine, which may be included in a tax-overhaul bill Congress is currently working on.

The individual insurance market, where people buy private coverage if they don’t get it through work or programs such as Medicare or Medicaid, remains largely stable for now. But analysts expect that next year, the gulf between people who get subsidies and those who don’t will widen.

Many of the roughly 8.7 million lower-income people who receive subsidies will see their financial-assistance rise to offset premium increases.

But the roughly 7 million middle-income consumers who make too much to get subsidies or are in plans that aren’t eligible for the aid may see their premiums jump. Republicans say that is because the ACA isn’t working and insurers are fleeing the market; Democrats say the GOP is driving up premiums by undermining the ACA and creating uncertainty.

“There is unquestionably a growing divide in affordability between lower-income people who qualify for premium subsidies and middle-income people who do not,” said Larry Levitt, a senior vice president at the Kaiser Family Foundation.

AnnMarie McIlwain, a patient advocate in Summit, N.J., pays \$1,087 a month for a family policy, and her premiums next year are going up 39%. With their deductible, the family’s annual health costs could surpass \$20,000.

“I find it outrageous. I think there’s going to be a huge outcry,” said Mrs. McIlwain, 56. “They have gone up year over year, but never like this.”

## The Wall Street Journal

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### Republicans Take Stock After Election Losses

By Janet Hook and Kristina Peterson, 11/8/17

Republicans scrambled Wednesday to prevent a potential Democratic wave in next year’s midterm elections after a political shellacking Tuesday fueled by opposition to President Donald Trump.

The results of elections from Virginia to Washington state produced Democratic victories up and down the ballot, prompting both parties to take fresh looks at their plans for House and Senate campaigns next year.

For Republicans in swing districts, the failed campaign of GOP gubernatorial candidate Ed Gillespie in Virginia was a reminder of the complex landscape ahead of them. Mr. Gillespie tried to walk a line by embracing Mr. Trump’s agenda but not campaigning alongside the GOP president.

He lost to Ralph Northam by 9 percentage points, the largest victory margin for a Virginia Democratic gubernatorial candidate since 1985. Mr. Northam notched even wider margins among women and suburban voters who will be central to key House battleground districts.

“It was a referendum on the president for many of them,” said Rep. Ryan Costello, a Republican

who heard that message even in local races in his swing district in suburban Philadelphia. “You had a lot more people, a lot more people vote Democrat than they ever had before.”

Bryan Lanza, who worked for Mr. Trump’s presidential campaign, said in an interview that the vote should be a wake-up call for Republicans who have not delivered on policy.

“Last night showed the voters are frustrated with the status quo and inaction,” Mr. Lanza said. “Republicans were punished at the polls, and it’s painful.”

House Republicans have long said that passing a tax overhaul was necessary for them to retain their House majority, but after Tuesday’s loss in Virginia some said that even that might not be sufficient.

“This really is a sort of do-or-die moment, in my view, in terms of holding the majority,” said Rep. Tom Cole (R., Okla.), referring to the tax legislation. “It doesn’t guarantee you success, but it’s a precondition for success.”

Democrats were surprised by the magnitude of their electoral wins, which overshadowed for now intraparty disagreements over how to recover from their bitter loss to Mr. Trump last year. Their wins came in both marquee races and more-obscure corners of the U.S. political map, which underscored for them the importance of fielding candidates even in long-shot districts to catch whatever political wave may form next year, strategists said.

In Virginia, Democrats not only swept the governor’s mansion and two other statewide offices, they are tantalizingly close to winning control of the House of Delegates. Democrats flipped at least 15 seats; if they pick up one more of the yet-to-be-settled races, Republicans would lose their majority. The last time Democrats ran the chamber was 1999.

In New Jersey, a Democratic victory in the gubernatorial race means the party will control both chambers of the state Legislature and the governor’s mansion, beginning in January.

The election of one new Democratic state senator in Washington state flipped party control of the chamber from Republican to Democratic.

In Georgia, Democrats won three state legislative special elections, including two in districts that were considered safely GOP. That cost Republicans their supermajority in the state Senate.

Political analysts and operatives from both parties caution against over reading the implications of one election for another especially when the next one is a year away.

Mr. Trump sought on Tuesday to pre-empt suggestions that the Virginia loss was a reflection on him, tweeting that Mr. Gillespie “did not embrace me or what I stand for.” The president’s associates continued the damage control Wednesday, with one calling reporters in for a briefing to say the result was “not about the president.”

But the impact of the president’s unpopularity was clear in the bitterly fought Virginia race. According to exit polls, 57% of Virginia voters said they disapproved of the job Mr. Trump was doing. Of those voters, 87% voted for Mr. Northam.

Asked what message they were sending with their vote, 34% said they were voting to express disapproval of the president—twice as many as said they were voting to express support for him.

“The level of intensity, the level of antipathy to Trump is so palpable,” said Rep. Gerry Connolly (D., Va.). “The desire of our base and independents troubled by Trump is just red-hot to do something. So when you offer them something, like an election, they came out in droves.”

There is historical precedent for the Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial races serving as a bellwether for the first midterm election of a new presidency. In 1994, 2006 and 2010—the last three times control of the House changed parties—the midterm result was foretold by the party that won the Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial races the year before.

Democrats need to flip 24 seats to take control of the House. Key targets are the 23 Republican-held districts where Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton beat Mr. Trump in 2016. But the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has said it aims to put 80 districts in play and has managed to recruit candidates in 75 of them so far.

“That strategy of building a huge battlefield with great candidates, even in really tough districts, is going to be crucial,” said Tyler Law, the committee’s spokesman.

In Virginia, Democrats made a concerted effort to field challengers for Republicans in the House of Delegates who had gone unopposed in the past. The candidate field was notably diverse, including the first openly transgender person to win state legislative office. They ended up winning at least 15 seats —far more than even the most optimistic partisans expected.

“It was beyond imaginable,” said Ben Wikler, Washington director of the liberal group Moveon.org. As returns rolled in, he said, “it felt like the Fourth of July, with fireworks going off every few minutes.”

Some activists believe the grass-roots campaigns behind the state legislative candidates helped drive turnout statewide, perhaps compensating for the tepid support some progressives felt for Mr. Northam, a soft-spoken former army doctor. Stephanie Taylor, a co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, called it a “reverse coattail” effect.

“We saw statewide candidates boosted by the energy of inspiring down-ballot candidates,” she said.

Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said the GOP couldn't afford to run away from a president so popular with the party base. “I will always say to any candidate in our party, the greatest enthusiasm in our party right now is for President Trump,” she said in an interview on Fox.

Many Republicans in swing districts will face the same conundrum that Mr. Gillespie confronted in Virginia. Can they run with Mr. Trump without risking alienating swing voters and can they run without him if they want to hold on to his supporters?

Some vulnerable Republicans said Wednesday that they would seek to brand themselves as independent operators not bound to Mr. Trump's confrontational style and populism.

"People understand that I'm very much an independent and I'm going to continue being an independent and a moderate," said Rep. John Katko, a New York Republican whose district Mrs. Clinton won last year.

Mr. Katko noted that one day earlier, he had been elected co-chairman of the Tuesday Group, a coalition of more than 50 centrist Republicans. "My brand, if you will, is well known to my local constituents," he said.

Jesse Hunt, a spokesman for the National Republican Congressional Committee, said that GOP leaders will do their best to arm incumbents for battle in the face of political winds they already knew were blowing hard against them.

"I don't think we needed last night's results to tell us next year was going to be extremely competitive," Mr. Hunt said. He added that the best way to counter the energy among anti-Trump Democratic voters is to invoke the person who energizes the GOP base: Rep. Nancy Pelosi of California, the House Democratic leader who often figures in Republican campaign ads.

"We are going to make this election about Nancy Pelosi," Mr. Hunt said.

